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AUTHOR Kerka, Sandra
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ABSTRACT

Within the last decade, many schools and departments of home economics have changed their name to "human ecology," whereas others have become "family and consumer sciences," and still others have remained unchanged. "Human ecology" has tended to be used more in higher education, and "family and consumer sciences," in secondary schools and professional organizations. The name changes are one manifestation of extensive soul searching within home economics, beginning in the late 1970s. At that time, Marjorie Brown and others proposed a reorientation of the curriculum from the traditional emphasis on technical and vocational skills of homemaking toward a critical sciences approach in order to help students learn to think, reflect, and take action through the study of perennial, practical family problems. Forces driving the changes in name and focus include the following: (1) changes in women's roles and family structures; (2) poor image and low priority accorded to home and family in society generally and consequently to the home economics field; (3) desire to increase the field's standing in academia and to recruit and retain students with a more relevant curriculum; (4) the influence of feminist thought, with its emphasis the on valuing the family sphere as much as the public sphere; and (5) the trend toward integrated curricula and holistic, connected forms of knowledge. The restructuring in home economic reflects the overall restructuring taking place in many educational institutions. The field of study still retains its focus on the work of the family, however. (Contains an annotated list of 16 references and 3 resource organizations.) (KC)

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Home Economics by Any Other Name
Trends and Issues Alerts

Sandra Kerka

ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education
Center on Education and Training for Employment
College of Education
The Ohio State University
1900 Kenny Road
Columbus, OH 43210-1090

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TRENDS AND ISSUES ALERTS
by Sandra Kerka 1996
ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education
CELEBRATING 30 YEARS - 1966-1996

Home Economics by Any Other Name

Within the last decade, many schools and departments of home economics have changed their name to "human ecology," others have turned to "family and consumer sciences," and still others have remained unchanged. This *Alert* looks at the impetus behind this trend and some of the issues involved in the refocusing of home economics curricula.

The word ecology derives from the Greek *oikos* (household), and "human ecology" was considered as a name for the field at the formative Lake Placid Conferences (1898-1908) (Brown 1993). Human ecology has tended to be adopted more in higher education, family and consumer sciences in secondary schools and the major professional associations. In fact, Bailey et al. (1993) define human ecology as an interdisciplinary *higher education* program concerned with family well-being, human development, human environments, and their interrelationships. The mission of family and consumer sciences (FCS) education is defined by the FCS Division of the American Vocational Association as preparing students for family life, work life, and careers in FCS. "Our unique focus is on families, work, and their interrelationships" (Redick 1995, p. 133).

The name changes are one manifestation of extensive soul searching within home economics, beginning as early as the late 1970s when Marjorie Brown and others proposed a reorientation of the curriculum from the traditional emphasis on technical/vocational skills of homemaking (cooking, sewing, etc.) toward a critical sciences approach: "helping students learn to think, reflect, and take action through the study of perennial, practical family problems" (ibid., p. 134). Home economics (by any name) is thus aligned with the emphasis on critical thinking curriculum in other curricular areas; it is seen as a program to prepare *all* students for work and family life (Thomas and Smith 1994). Forces driving the changes in name and focus include the following: (1) changes in women's roles and family structures; (2) poor image and low priority accorded to home and family in society generally and consequently to the home economics field; (3) desire to increase the field's standing in the academy and to recruit and retain students with a more relevant curriculum; (4) the influence of feminist thought, which emphasizes that the "Hestian" (private/family/household) sphere and its ways of knowing should be as valued as the "Hermean" (public) sphere (McGregor 1994); and (5) the trend toward integrated curricula and holistic, connected forms of knowledge.

Brown (1993) asserts that "for home economics to adopt 'human ecology' as a name for the profession and its subject matter is both presumptuous and illogical and is sometimes motivated only by a concern for image-building" (p. 411). Although the name confusion and struggles over curriculum and professional identity may give the impression of a field in crisis, what is happening in home economics reflects the overall restructuring taking place in many educational institutions. Thompson (1995) suggests that recent pressures on home economics stem from "structural problems in society as a whole"—such as the multiple social problems affecting families—"and not from intrinsic defects in the field" (p. 53). Redick (1995) concludes that the name changes are not the essence of what has happened in the field over the past decade, but "one very visible outcome of the substantial changes that have taken place in what was once known almost universally as home economics. One thing, however, has not changed: this field of study still retains its focus on the work of the family" (p. 148).

Print Resources

Bailey, L.; Firebaugh, F. M.; Haley, E. G.; and Nickols, S. Y. "Human Ecology in Higher Education: Surviving beyond 2000." *Journal of Home Economics* 85, no. 4 (Winter 1993): 3-10.
Suggests what human ecology programs must do in order to survive the restructuring of higher education institutions and to further the mission of the field.

Brown, M. M. *Philosophical Studies of Home Economics in the U.S. Basic Ideas by Which Home Economists Understand Themselves.* East Lansing: Michigan State University, 1993.
This critical analysis of the history of the profession and its philosophical bases examines home economics as a practical field, professional community, interdisciplinary field, and as human ecology.

Davis, M. L. "Perspectives on Home Economics: Unity and Identity." *Journal of Home Economics* 85, no. 4 (Winter 1993): 27-32.
Analyzes reasons for the name changes in home economics and their effect on the perception of the field from within and without.

Dykman, A. "Out of the Frying Pan . . . and into the 90s." *Vocational Education Journal* 68, no. 3 (March 1993): 24-27, 45. (EJ 458 702)
The "new" home economics focuses on combating sex stereotypes, developing living skills such as balancing work and family, integrating academic and vocational skills, encouraging male enrollment, and helping students deal with serious social problems.

Haley, E. G.; Peggram, R. S.; and Ley, C. J. "Enhancing Program Visibility." *Journal of Home Economics* 85, no. 4 (Winter 1993): 11-17.
Reports on the American Home Economics Association's 1993 survey of higher education home economics units, documenting changes in names, enrollment trends, and responses to institutional restructuring.

Klein, S. R. "Changing Roles at Home." *Journal of Home Economics* 85, no. 4 (Winter 1993): 19-25. (EJ 500 779)
Recent role changes, especially those of women, necessitate a restructuring of home economics. Retaining its family focus, it should emphasize the roles of all family members, quality of life, and the social relevance of family issues and family life education.

Larson, B. J. "The Forgotten Discipline." *Journal of Home Economics* 82, no. 4 (Winter 1990): 16-20. (EJ 417 734)
Home economics has been ignored in recent educational reform efforts, although its curriculum fulfills many frequently mentioned reform objectives: critical thinking, understanding of human experience, preparation for work, communication skills, active participation, contextuality, and moral reasoning.

McGregor, S. L. T. "Influencing and Shaping Policy from a Hestian Perspective." *Canadian Home Economics Journal* 44, no. 2 (Spring 1994): 78-80.
The Hestian (private/household/family) sphere lacks power and is not valued. The field of home economics should strive to influence policy and assert the value of Hestian skills and caring and connection.

Montgomery, B., and Way, W. L. "Lost and Found Voices in the Process of Curriculum Change." American Vocational Association conference paper, December 1995.
Interviews with 10 family and consumer science teachers revealed that curriculum change was an experience of discontinuous ways of knowing. In practice, teachers often based content on a technical view of home economics and reported change as both an intellectual and an emotional experience.

Redick, S. S. "The Family and Consumer Sciences Curriculum." In *Content of the Curriculum, 2d ed.*, edited by A. A. Glatthorn, pp. 130-152. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1995. (ED 390 175)
Discusses the emergence of a philosophical base for family and consumer sciences and reports on the movement toward a process-oriented curriculum that emphasizes critical thinking and practical problem solving focused on the family.

Smith, F. M. "From Home Economics to Family and Consumer Sciences." *Journal of Family and Consumer Sciences* 87, no. 2 (Summer 1995): 13-20. (EJ 517 345)
Gives an overview of the development of home economics in higher education and describes one university's revision of its core curriculum.

Smith, G., and Lowe, A. C. "Pure Home Economics or Just a Fad?" American Educational Research Association conference paper, April 1996.
A survey of Canadian home economics teachers found considerable support for a global perspective. Results indicate that home economics should not jump on the bandwagon, but relate global issues to its central focus on the family and on critical thinking/practical reasoning.

Thomas, J., and Smith, G. "Toward an Ideal of the Person Educated in Home Economics." *Canadian Home Economics Journal* 44, no. 1 (Winter 1994): 20-25. (EJ 477 018)
Examines the educational ideals explicit in Marjorie Brown's conception of home economics education and describes the necessary dispositions and attributes in light of contemporary critiques in education.

Thompson, P. J. "Reconceptualizing the Private/Public Spheres." *Canadian Home Economics Journal* 45, no. 2 (Spring 1995): 53-57. (EJ 504 432)
Recasts home economics using systems theory, social construction, and feminist principles in terms of private/public (Hestian/Hermean) space. Suggests that this framework provides a nongendered vocabulary with which to look at family and state as interacting, self-regulating systems.

Thompson, P. J. "A 'Place' for Theory in Home Economics." *Canadian Home Economics Journal* 46, no. 2 (Spring 1996): 58-62.
It is not gender that differentiates home economics, but the Hestian principles it addresses. Rather than name changes, home economics needs descriptive and explanatory theory that supports its reason for being.

Vaines, E. "Ecology as a Unifying Theme for Home Economics/Human Ecology." *Canadian Home Economics Journal* 44, no. 2 (Spring 1994): 59-62. (EJ 482 731)
Discusses the complex character of everyday life as the deep ecology of home economics/human ecology. Explores the meanings of ecology and the ways in which diversity and harmony are interrelated companions of dynamic living systems.

Resource Organizations

American Association of Family and Consumer Sciences, 1555 King Street, Alexandria, VA 22314 (703/706-4600; fax: 703/706-HOME)

Family and Consumer Sciences Division, American Vocational Association, 1410 King Street, Alexandria, VA 22314 (800/826-9972; fax: 703/683-7424; Internet: amvocassn@aol.com)

Family and Consumer Sciences Education Association, College of Professional Studies, Central Washington University, Ellensburg, WA 98926 (509/963-2304 or 963-2766; fax: 509/963-2787)

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1900 KENNY ROAD • COLUMBUS, OHIO 43210